

SOAPSTone

A strategy for analyzing documents

When analyzing POV on a historical document you are trying to decide if it is a credible piece of evidence or if biases or other factors have distorted the truth. Look for the following:

S = Speaker

Who is the speaker? Who is the voice telling the story? What is the speaker's point of view? Is the speaker a reliable source? Why or why not? Is the speaker biased? Would the speaker have reason to naturally be in favor of or against the topic of the document? Does the race, gender, age, occupation, nationality or occupation of the speaker make him/her an objective voice? Why or why not? If it is from an anonymous source would that make it more reliable than one where the person has identified himself? Why or why not? Does the speaker has a hidden agenda? If so, what may it be? Is the speaker saying what one would expect him or her to say or is it a surprising point of view given who he/she is? Example: If you wanted to know how the football team played at our last game, who would you consider to be a more reliable, objective source: a player on the team or a local newspaper reporter? Why?

O – Occasion

When and where was it written? Within what historical context does this take place? What is the immediate situation or event which may have triggered the document? For example, if it is a speech delivered to the public during a celebration, can you expect it exaggerate certain ideas in order to grab their attention? If it is a testimony of events that occurred several years ago, would you still consider it reliable information?

A = Audience

What group of readers is the document directed to? Would that tend to make it credible or not? Is it a personal letter to a friend or relative? Is it a diary entry and therefore not meant for others to read? Is it an editorial in the newspaper? Would the speaker have a need to not be completely truthful to this audience? Why or why not?

P = Purpose

What are the reasons behind the text? What is it intended to do? What does it want its audience to think or to as a result of reading it?

S = Subject

What is the general topic, content and ideas contained in the text. This is a summary of its main points in few words or phrases.

T = Tone

What is the attitude of the speaker? The tone of the document extends meaning beyond the literal meaning. Is it sarcastic, rhetorical, pleading?